

TheCrimAcademy_67_Kolbeck

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SPEAKERS

Simon Kolbeck, Jenn Tostlebe, Jose Sanchez



Jose Sanchez 00:14

Hi everyone. Welcome back to the criminology Academy where we are criminally academic. We are your hosts Jose Sanchez,



Jenn Tostlebe 00:20

and Jenn Tostlebe.



Jose Sanchez 00:21

And today on the podcast we have doctoral student Simon Kolbeck who is speaking with us about race, employment and recidivism.



Jenn Tostlebe 00:28

Simon Kolbeck is a doctoral student in the Ohio State University's Department of Sociology. His research focuses on conditions that influence recidivism and desistance among the formerly incarcerated with a focus on employment and cognitive factors. In addition, Simon's work aims to enhance understanding on the relationship between work--both on and off the books--and crime. He is currently involved in a number of projects that examine how employment race and cognitive change influences reoffending among the formerly incarcerated. At OSU Simon is an affiliate of the Criminal Justice Research Center. It's so great to have you on the podcast with us today, Simon, we are looking forward to the conversation.



Simon Kolbeck 01:09

Thanks. Yeah, I'm really excited. And thank you for inviting me, I appreciate it.



Jose Sanchez 01:13

Alright, so just a brief overview of what today is going to look like. So we're gonna start off with this broader discussion on race, employment, work history, and recidivism. Then we're gonna move into a paper that was co authored by Simon. And then we're gonna, if we have time, at the end, talk about some of Simon's ongoing projects. And so with that being said, Jenn, why don't you get us started?



Jenn Tostlebe 01:36

Awesome. Thanks, Jose. All right. So as we've mentioned a couple of times now, this episode is really a discussion surrounding how race and work history impacts the employment-recidivism relationship. And we've talked about recidivism a number of times on the podcast, because that's one of my areas, so I tend to kind of gravitate toward those subjects. But for a recap, broadly, recidivism is this act of reoffending after some sanction, typically, and in this case, incarceration. So to really kick start our discussion, we want to start with the basics--in true Crim Academy fashion--and so Simon, broadly speaking, how does incarceration impact the likelihood of subsequent incarceration?



Simon Kolbeck 02:21

Yeah, that's a great question. When you think about incarceration, first of all, to be reincarcerated, you have to be incarcerated in the first place. But thinking about just the general impacts of incarceration on a life course, right, incarceration is a very, it derails one's life course, significantly. You get wrenched out of your employment, your community, and you spend months to years in a confined facility, right, a lot of your social bonds deteriorate. And then when you're released, you're expected to go back into the community and function as you had previously. And that's a very tall order for a lot of people who have been away for a long period of time. So it's not necessarily that incarceration itself increases the likelihood of reincarceration. But I think that once someone has been incarcerated, they are likely to reincarcerate because of the adverse impacts of incarceration, and because of difficulties of reintegrating into the community. Right, like you think, ideally, you know, you set up some kind of counterfactual, right, where you have a case where someone is incarcerated at a later point in their life course. And then you would ask, would this have happened, regardless of whether they were incarcerated previously? And I guess that's really complicated. But I think that's sort of how I think about the impact of incarceration and how incarceration impacts later, reincarceration.



Jenn Tostlebe 03:47

Yeah, and just to kind of segue off of what you're saying, in my mind, it's almost like when they get out of prison or jail, they're not just expected to act how they were before they're expected to act better in quotes, whatever that means. And so just to kind of tie in with what you were saying, I think that is a tall order, for sure.

S

Simon Kolbeck 04:09

That's a great point, right? Because of probation, they typically have to act like quote, unquote, a model citizen, right, which is even something that most of us don't have to do, necessarily. So that's yeah, that's a really great point.

J

Jose Sanchez 04:22

So one of the things that you just mentioned was when you get incarcerated, you lose your employment typically. So we want to start moving towards that employment and recidivism relationship. And so based on prior research, what do we know about this employment and recidivism relationship?

S

Simon Kolbeck 04:40

Yeah, that's a great question. And this is sort of what I've studied, mostly, right. Like a lot of my work really focuses deeply on the relationship between employment and recidivism, but also employment and desistance, right, which is kind of related to recidivism, but it's not quite the same thing. Right. Just to clarify that point right, desistance kinda refers to the gradual reduction of crime over the life course, or the reduction in offending, whereas recidivism is really a criminal justice indicator, right? It's defined by contact with the criminal justice system. But one would imagine that someone who's desisting from crime is also less likely to recidivate and vice versa. But anyway, the relationship between employment and recidivism and crime in general, I mean, it's been really widely studied. And there's a lot of papers, looking at the relationship between recidivism and employment. And I think, you know, most papers find an inverse relationship between recidivism and employment. I think, sort of the next frontier in this research is really figuring out what employment characteristics matter and why employment matters, right? There's all these different competing theories like Rational choice theory, Sampson and Laub's turning point theory, and now more recently, there's been sort of a shift towards these cognitive identity theories that kind of argue that the relationship between employment and offending/recidivism is largely spurious. So despite the fact that all these studies find that there's an inverse relationship, it's really hard to actually pinpoint whether this is a direct effect of employment, or whether there's some kind of selection process going on here. And some studies are even finding now more and more that low quality employment might even be criminogenic, in the sense that either the job is so precarious and low paying that it actually has no impact on crime and actually encourages the person who's, you know, employed to commit more crime, or, alternatively, that people might be using employment as a way to deflect attention from law enforcement, right? These are just theories, and it's very hard to test these effects. But I think that's sort of where the literature is currently at, and what scholars of work and crime are really grappling with.

J

Jose Sanchez 06:50

Yeah. So we have all these theories, like Sampson and Laub's theory is kind of one of like the ones that immediately comes to mind when people think life course, you know, like employment is such a core piece of that theory. And so getting into some of like, the differences that we might see. So Jenn mentioned recidivism, people usually think

reincarceration, but it's not the only outcome, right, like you could be put on probation. Is there a difference in the impact that employment has for someone who is released from prison versus someone who was or is put on probation?

S

Simon Kolbeck 07:25

I don't think I have an answer to that question. I assume that probation functions similarly to parole in that sense, right, that the person is being monitored. And I mean, a person on probation is probably already been monitored, and by the criminal justice system. So I guess it also depends whether seeking employment is a stipulation of their sanction or not. I would say I don't really have a good answer to that question.



Jenn Tostlebe 07:52

Yeah, I wasn't sure if anyone had actually looked at that. I don't feel like I've seen any studies on it.

J

Jose Sanchez 07:57

yeah, I guess it might also matter more, why the sanction had been like a felony versus a misdemeanor. Like if you're just probation for like a DUI, that might not have really an impact on employment, since no one really has to know because like,

S

Simon Kolbeck 08:12

I suppose the question also more so like whether being incarcerated has a more severe impact on employment later in life than being on probation. And if that's sort of the relationship that we're interested in, right, I guess, then I would assume incarceration has a more severe impact just because the gap and work history because you can still work while you're on probation. But when you're incarcerated, you're typically out of the workforce for a long time. And we know how much incarceration impacts mental health and well being. So those are other factors that might make it more difficult to work in the future. And obviously, your criminal record is a little bit more severe if you were in prison. So I would assume that incarceration has a more adverse impact on later employment outcomes. That's speculation, like Jenn said, I don't know any research that looks at that specifically.



Jenn Tostlebe 08:58

Alright, so we want to kind of take this from this more theoretical type argument and attempt to put some numbers on this to provide kind of a clearer picture. So when people are released from prison, just how successful are they in obtaining employment? Do we have statistics on this? Or is there some other way people are measuring this successfulness?

S

Simon Kolbeck 09:21



SIMON KOLBECK 09:21

Yeah, I mean, I think it's important when you're talking with the population that goes to prison that is released, that population is already very marginally attached to the labor market to begin with, even before they go to prison. So I think the bar for success should probably be lowered considerably, right? I mean, if we think of this population, I don't want to make numbers here, but I think around half probably have not completed high school. I mean, that's one of the main selection factors into crime and incarceration and minorities are obviously over represented and there are certain challenges associated with getting employment, if you're non white in the US, obviously. And so the main point being that this population is already not doing well in the labor market. So when they're released from prison, they were likely not really working in high paying stable jobs before. Some obviously are right, I would say that, you know, the minority. The majority are probably marginally attached to the labor market and having any employment is already a big achievement and could be considered a sign of success and then having a stable job with consistent wages is definitely not the norm. So in terms of numbers, right, like in the data that I have looked at, administrative data that we use to write the Criminology piece, right, the majority are various high percentage, probably 40% or more are just not employed in the immediate time after prison. And then among those who are employed, a very small group are consistently employed. And this is kind of most studies that study this population find the same thing.



Jose Sanchez 11:02

Alright, so talking about your Criminology piece, I think now's a good time to start moving into it. So this paper was authored by our guest Simon and his colleagues, Paul Bellair and Steven Lopez, it is titled, "Race, work history, and the employment recidivism relationship" It was published in Criminology in 2022. And sort of pulling from some of your own words. In this article, Simon and his co-authors wanted to examine what role race and employment play in recidivism. Specifically, they wanted to address three key issues. First, whether recidivism by Black people was most likely due to being less employed than other groups or if employment itself was less of a protective factor than to other groups. They also looked at the impact work history has on the employment-recidivism relationship. Finally, they explored whether steady employment provided an additional reduction to recidivism as opposed to just being employed at all. To do all of this, they used administrative prison records, unemployment insurance (UI) quarterly data, and recidivism follow up data documenting multiple failures for over eight years. I hope that's a fair, quick summary of your paper.



Jenn Tostlebe 12:12

I feel like that is the abstract?



Simon Kolbeck 12:16

Yeah, that's a good summary.



Jenn Tostlebe 12:17

So really, in the first part of this episode, we were focusing very strictly on employment and

recidivism, like in the broad sense, and as you just mentioned, in this paper, you're focusing on two specific factors or stratifiers that interact with prison sentences to impact post prison employment outcomes. And so first, based on prior work, what's already been done, can you give us kind of this broad picture of the relationship between employment and race and ethnicity? Do we see disparities in this relationship?

S

Simon Kolbeck 12:51

Yeah, we definitely see disparities. When it comes to returning citizens, white returning citizens just tend to have better employment outcomes. We document this, but that's nothing particularly new. I mean, most studies that look at employment outcomes after prison, find similar effects, you know, and argue that a lot of that has to do with, you know, obviously, employer discrimination, but also with the fact that white returning citizens often have better access to employment networks, there was a study, I believe in social problems that really looked at that in detail about how social networks and work networks really help white returning citizens get kind of more desirable jobs. So in short, yeah. Black returning citizens are definitely disadvantaged in the labor market. I'm sorry, what was the second part of the



Jenn Tostlebe 13:37

Really, it was just to figure out how race and employment kind of mesh together.

S

Simon Kolbeck 13:42

Okay, yeah. And so, in terms of the moderation of effect, right, we were kind of thinking about some of the literature on work. And my co author, Steven Lopez is really instrumental in this because he's a work scholar. He's really in tune with the employment literature and work literature. And he was really, really instrumental in developing this idea that, you know, because Black people in the United States tend to often face not just discrimination in terms of being able to get employment, but discrimination and racism in the workplace itself, that we thought it was possible that for Black returning citizens there, you know, employment might not have the same protective effect, because they don't have, they might be less likely to develop the bonds that Sampson and Laub think are so important, or this emotional attachment or, you know, they might get treated poorly at work, or more poorly than their white coworkers. And as a result, might not care as much about the job. You know, obviously, it's theoretical speculation, but we thought that that might be something that's going on behind the scenes, sort of.

J

Jose Sanchez 14:46

So the second strand of fire that used to be his work history, so just talking about sort of work history by itself right now. How does work history impact post prison employment?

S

Simon Kolbeck 14:58

Well, so in our analysis, we kind of find that those returning citizens who had a work history did better after prison. Actually no, they didn't necessarily do better, but employment had a little bit of a stronger effect, right suggesting that if you, you know, employment has this stronger protective effect if you had been employed previously, and we think this might have something to do with just how, you know, over time, those people with a work history just have more experience or more of a sort of relationship with employment. And obviously, there could be a selection effect there as well. But that's sort of one of the main findings of the paper is that work history did seem to moderate the relationship. But not race, which is kind of key. And I think that's really important. And going back to the actually, I'm probably jumping the gun here. The fact that, you know, race didn't actually serve as a moderator is, in some respects, encouraging, right, like, you know, that employment has a similar effect for Black and white returning citizens is good. And the only, you know, problem with the work history being a moderator is that, you know, because Black returning citizens were probably less likely in general to have employment, you know, they're also less likely to have a work history. So that might be one way that effect is influenced by race.

J Jose Sanchez 16:12

Kind of going back to like your front end a little bit. There was one point when while reading through your paper that I thought was interesting, and I believe you're talking about the Harding paper, and it was that relative to probation, incarceration was associated with improved post release outcomes for Black and white people with no work history. Can you maybe elaborate or sort of give us your thoughts on why you think that might be?

S Simon Kolbeck 16:37

Yeah, definitely. So Harding is research design is very interesting. Him and his coauthors, they basically use judge leniency as an instrumental variable. And so they basically look at the population of people in Michigan that go into the court system, and then either get placed on probation or incarceration. And by using this judge leniency variable, they're able to kind of set up a, I guess, like a natural experiment. So it's, I think, in part there, the reason they compare probationers to people who are incarcerated is because of just out of necessity, but also it kind of, what their research design does is isolate the effect of incarceration relative to probation. So that's why we have to talk about it in that way. But the reason I think that the employment outcomes are actually improved for those who are incarcerated is that, despite the fact that incarceration can have, you know, obviously, often does have very negative effects on people's lives, they can sometimes, you know, have a positive effect, right, you know, people who go to prison can improve their education. Whereas if they hadn't gone in, they might not have or they can get work experience. And for some people, prison does sort of provide a turning point, I guess, right. That they get incarcerated and while they're incarcerated, they, you know, have time to think and reflect and make the decision that once they're out there, they don't want to go back. Right. So that might be why. And it's especially important to think about this group that experiences improved outcomes, right? They're the group that already has the worst outcomes to begin with. There's not really much room for downward mobility, right. So for those that are on probation, they probably just continue with their trajectory. While, for those who are incarcerated, I think the incarceration effect itself might actually improve the outcomes for this group, because they're, I guess, outcomes already so low prior to incarceration. Right. And they, importantly, Harding finds the opposite effect for those who are

doing well before prison, right, those who are doing well before prison in terms of employment actually have worse outcomes after incarceration, which is, I thought, a really, really interesting effect.



Jenn Tostlebe 18:44

Silver lining of incarceration, right for some people.



Simon Kolbeck 18:47

Yeah definitely.



Jose Sanchez 18:48

Yeah.



Jenn Tostlebe 18:49

All right. So earlier, we talked a little bit of or you talked a little bit about job stability, and the importance of it. And you have a section in your paper that is really all about conceptualizing employment for what you're looking at this employment-recidivism relationship. And so why do you think it was important to devote a section on this conceptualization and how did you end up defining improvement in your study?




Simon Kolbeck 19:14


Yeah, that's a really good question. It's important because measuring employment is really hard, first of all. It seems simple on the surface, but when you really get into the nitty gritty, it's really complicated, because you have to think about all the different mechanisms by which employment might reduce crime and also all the potential things that you're omitting, right like our measure is consistency. But in an ideal world, we would have information on like, the person's emotional relationship with work, you know, whether it's part time full time, whether the work is rewarding, whether they get paid well, and we had data on wages, but modeling wages jointly with employment is another headache that yeah, that's just a whole other headache. But the reason we decided to talk about the conceptualization of employment is because a lot of studies, I think just kind of look at like an employment binary or use measures of stability. And we decided to look at consecutive quarters employed. And I think part of the motivation was just to make an argument about why that's a good measure. And I think with the population of returning citizens, being employed in consecutive quarters is a fairly good outcome. And so that was our motivation for that particular section and discussing the challenges and of operationalizing employment and why our approach is useful.





Jenn Tostlebe 20:37


And if I remember right...Sorry! When you were looking at these consecutive quarters, it didn't matter if they switched jobs, right?


 S Simon Kolbeck 20:44
Correct. Yeah.

 Jenn Tostlebe 20:45
So don't a lot of studies, like look at one job and how long you've had the one job?

 S Simon Kolbeck 20:51
Yeah, and I think I'm glad you pointed that out, you know, I haven't really looked, you know, engaged with this paper in a while. But yeah, you're right, we do talk about why that might not be the best way to think about employment among returning citizens, because returning citizens, are not very, you know, employed a lot in general, but it's rare that they stay at one job for a long time. And, you know, the kind of jobs that a lot of returning citizens work are very sporadic and seasonal. If you think about jobs, like construction, that's sort of a very on and off kind of job. And so you can think of a person who's employed, doing construction work for two months, and then there's like, kind of a lull in activities. So they seek some other like intermittent work working on like lawn crews, or taking like a job at like, some, I don't know, slaughterhouse or whatever, you know, you can kind of get the picture. And so we thought that maybe it's not right to look at time spent at one job, but to look at just general patterns of employment, which is obviously not perfect, either. And I'm not saying that, you know, time spent at one job is a bad measure of employment. It certainly isn't. But when you're thinking about this population, right, and how sporadically, they're employed, you know, spending a lot of time at one particular job might be too high of a bar, in general.

 Jenn Tostlebe 22:10
Yeah, I just wanted to bring that up, because I thought it was kind of a really cool creative way to conceptualize this measure that I don't feel like I've seen in other studies.

 S Simon Kolbeck 22:19
Thank you.

 Jenn Tostlebe 22:20
I thought it was a really interesting way to talk about it. And theoretically, it made sense. And as you just described, so yeah, I liked it.

S Simon Kolbeck 22:27

I'm glad to hear that.

J Jose Sanchez 22:29

Alright, so I can already hear people right now, like screaming at us to talk about this term that you and I have both mentioned, multiple failures, and relax people we're getting to it right now. And so multiple failures is something that is used in this paper, and it's typically unusual in recidivism research. Recidivism research typically will focus on the first failure.

S Simon Kolbeck 22:51

Mhm.

J Jose Sanchez 22:51

Can you explain to us what exactly you mean by multiple failures and why this is important?

S Simon Kolbeck 22:57

Yeah, I mean, to put it very simply, right, multiple failure is just additional failures beyond the first one. Our first data really only had information on the first failure, you know, and what recidivism studies will typically do is generally looking at within the first three years, because that's when most recidivism events occur. Obviously, there's exceptions to that. But multiple failure data, in our case, we just got information on whether someone who were surveyed and then went on to recidivate, after recidivating the first time and so our data is basically structured in what we call street intervals, right? So one interval could be the point leading up to a recidivism event, then, you know, a person might be released, recidivate again, that would form another interval. So our data was spanned from 2003 to 2014. So we had all kinds of street intervals in that time period. And there's a couple of advantages to looking at multiple failure data. One, it's simply interesting just to see how often some people go in and out of prison. And it's kind of shocking how many times some people cycle in and out of prison majority, it's one or zero times, right. But there are cases where someone goes back three or four times, which is a lot. And then the second advantage of using multiple failure data is that you can use analytic techniques that kind of help you get at unobserved heterogeneity. So by having multiple failure data, we were able to run frailty model, which is a survival model that basically just adds a random effect, that random effect is designed to get at sort of an underlying propensity for recidivism, right, that could be higher for some people because of unobserved factors. Now, once again, it's obviously not like perfect, and it doesn't just make unobserved heterogeneity go away, but it does kind of help account for unobserved factors. So those were the two main motivations and reasons we looked at multiple failure data.



J Jenn Tostlebe 24:58

All right. So you started getting into your results a little bit, we want to kind of break them

All right. So you started getting into your results a little bit, we want to kind of break them down piece by piece. And so just as a reminder for everyone, you were really interested in whether employment has divergent impacts on recidivism by race and work history among the formerly incarcerated. Let's just start by simply asking what were the recidivism rates in your sample?

S

Simon Kolbeck 25:23

Yeah, I need to refresh my memory to, and pull up the table. But we have this one table that looks at it by interval and one that looks at it by person level. So at the person level, right, so they're about 58% of our cases, had zero recidivism events, and 26% had one event. And then 12% had two events, 4% and three more events, you know, we're talking about a little under half, well, around 40% had at least one recidivism event, which I don't know, I think that might fit the general findings from other studies that look at these same types of samples, right, that there is a very high rate of recidivism, although, you know, some studies use arrest and we use reincarceration, which kind of vices are downward a little bit. Or if you look at arrest, I'm sure the numbers are even higher, but those are



Jenn Tostlebe 26:17

Yeah, I think it's like 80%, for arrest. So it would make sense for your sample to be like half of that.

S

Simon Kolbeck 26:23

Yeah, exactly. So those are the recidivism rates for our sample. I think that's those are descriptively, the only recidivism statistics we report, and then we look at it by race, you know, we find that the Black returning citizens, actually majority of Black returning citizens recidivate, it's about 54%. And it's whereas it's only about 38% of white returning citizens. So there definitely racial disparities in the recidivism rate in our sample.



Jenn Tostlebe 26:52

All right, and then also more descriptively, what percentage of your participants managed to gain employment post release?

S

Simon Kolbeck 27:00

Right, so it's about half. So there are 46% with no employment. I should clarify that there's about 46% of intervals where people in our sample were not employed. So that's a little bit problematic, because intervals kind of vary in how long they are, but 40 to 50% is about the number of people who really don't.



Jenn Tostlebe 27:24

And that mapped on to prior research, right, from what you were saying earlier.

S

Simon Kolbeck 27:28

I think that conforms roughly to what other studies have found the past.



Jenn Tostlebe 27:34

All right, so then, looking at the employment and recidivism relationship, what were you finding in your sample?

S

Simon Kolbeck 27:41

We tend to find that employment is correlated with reduced recidivism, and that the group that or at least in intervals, so I keep jumping between interval and person, right, so it's important to remember when we talk about recidivism, we're talking about intervals, right? So one person could have multiple intervals, but in intervals where a person had employment, they were less likely to recidivate and in intervals where they had consistent employment, those intervals with consistent employment also had the best recidivism outcomes in general. But when we ran our models, the difference between inconsistent and consistent employment was not very pronounced, and I believe it was insignificant or not statistically significant, not insignificant. At least when you compare the two, right, relative to no employment, they both confer protective effects. So I mean, I guess what that means, you know, the way we interpreted that as unemployment matters, but that the difference between consistent and inconsistent is not particularly pronounced. Yeah, we thought that was interesting, too. I mean, we were expecting consistent to be far and away the best outcome.



Jenn Tostlebe 28:50

The better.

S

Simon Kolbeck 28:50

Yeah.

J

Jose Sanchez 28:51

So you started to tap into this, and one of the previous questions, but, you know, just to maybe briefly reiterate, and if anything you want to add on to it. But what were your findings regarding the moderation or the impact that race had on post prison employment and recidivism?

S

Simon Kolbeck 29:08

Right, so we didn't actually find a moderating effect of employment. But we did find that Black returning citizens had worse employment outcomes than white returning citizens, which I'll reiterate, is really nothing new. But the fact that there's no moderating effect kind of shows that race differences in recidivism aren't necessarily the result of employment impacting different racial groups differently. Right. So the effect of employment I think, is the same regardless of race. But, you know, because Black returning citizens are less likely to be employed, right? One could see how that might cause disparities and recidivism and our paper doesn't actually test that. We just kind of, thinking about our results, you know, we were kind of speculating that might be one pathway by which racial disparities and recidivism arise and I think that's something worth looking at in the future, but because there's no moderation effects, we can kind of safely say that employment is generally beneficial, regardless of whether you're Black or white.



Jenn Tostlebe 30:08

All right, and then the moderation for recent work history and employment on recidivism, did this vary by race?



Simon Kolbeck 30:16

Yeah, so the moderation of recent work history didn't vary by race. But recent work history did seem to. If you're employed after prison, and you had a recent work history, work seemed to have a stronger effect, or was more likely to reduce your recidivism than if you did not have a recent to work history. And this moderation effect is not huge, but it definitely suggests that the kind of your employment record and history in the past leads you to benefit more from employment.



Jose Sanchez 30:48

It's no secret on this podcast that Jenn and I are both fond of criminological theory. And you actually devote a pretty significant amount of time to theory in this paper, particularly you talk about theories of desistance such as the previously mentioned Sampson and Laub age-graded theory of informal social control. But you also talk about Paternoster and Bushway's identity theory.



Simon Kolbeck 31:11

Right.



Jose Sanchez 31:11


Can you tell us more about the theoretical implications of your study?



Simon Kolbeck 31:16

S Simon Kolbeck 31:16

Yeah, it's a little tough because I don't want to jump to any conclusions. And you know, this paper doesn't really test the theory, necessarily, the theory kind of just motivates the analysis. But I would say that in terms of theories that predict the relationship between employment and offending, you know, I think this paper generally supports those theories. But like I said before, I don't think we can really discount these identity theories, you know, it's entirely possible that majority of these effects are driven by an identity transformation. And I think life course criminologists are really just now starting to really deeply look into the at least test the life course theory with identity theories. And I believe there's a forthcoming paper in criminology that does exactly that. But it's really difficult to test those two types of theories, right, there's a lot of methodological challenges. But in terms of our paper, you know, I think we present evidence that employment does have a protective effect after prison. And, you know, our method, while it doesn't fully account for unobserved heterogeneity does allow us to kind of isolate some of the unobserved factors, or at least account for some of those factors. And our controls are also pretty robust. And so I would say that we account for a lot of the things that could influence both employment and recidivism after prison. So to conclude, I would say, you know, we do find general support for those theories that argue that employment has an effect.

 Jenn Tostlebe 32:49

And so flipping to the policy and practice implications, given everything we've discussed, what would you say are the implications for future research and policy and practice?

S Simon Kolbeck 33:00

Sure, well, in terms of policy, I think it's really tough. And I don't think I can make too many policy recommendations, right, like employment programming is already a thing, those outcomes have been studied as well. And there's mixed evidence. And, you know, I think my main thing with policy is that we just have to kind of keep looking at these relationships. And then the more we find out, the more we can tailor reentry programming to be more effective. But I think employment programming can't hurt necessarily. And in terms of future research, I mean, I think, as I alluded to a little bit before, right, the next stage is really just to unpack employment, right? And just really get at the different characteristics of employment, and just look at what factors of employment are important, you know, which would also help us kind of differentiate between certain theories, right, like Rational choice theory is a little bit more focused on financial rewards. And whereas Sampson and Laub's theory focuses more on emotional bonds. And so really, unpacking the effect of employment on crime and recidivism, I think is a really important next step. And then also just kind of building these identity theories into this research, right? And kind of merging two literature's and in order to kind of figure out, you know, whether identity changes are really what's most important, or whether there's some kind of interaction as like Giordano and colleagues sort of predict, right? I think that'll be a really interesting next sort of, I'll say, frontier for this line of research.

J Jose Sanchez 34:40

Right. And so one more question it's not necessarily like, specific to your paper, but I think this might be interesting. In your paper and I'm sure many others race was dichotomy of Black and white. Has there been any work done that's looked at employment and recidivism that also

includes other ethnoracial groups?

S

Simon Kolbeck 34:58

The reason we use a dichotomy is because our sample really is mainly just Black and white, right? We have 10 cases of someone who was labeled as other. I was actually surprised by that. And I'm not sure why that is maybe just the way that they pulled the sample from ODRC? And to answer your question, I don't think there's too much work that looks at other racial groups, although there is that book by Bruce Western I think it's called *Homeward*. And a book by Harding, where they definitely have Hispanics in their sample, although it's not there are not many. And I don't think there's large quantitative studies that distinguish. typically, those are the three main groups that arise from data, and anybody else is kind of coded as other. But I haven't seen any large scale quantitative studies that include Hispanics with Blacks and whites, and really kind of unpack the differences between those three groups. I think that'll be an interesting thing to look at, too, right? Because we know from other research, right, that employment outcomes are different between all three groups. And same with criminal justice outcomes. And I think extending this to recidivism will be incredibly interesting. And I will just add quickly that I think the reason there isn't much work on this yet is because you know, the population of Hispanics in the US has just really begun to grow considerably over the last like 30-40 years. And a lot of these samples were taken from like, early 2000s. So as we get newer samples, and newer data, I think more work on this will be done, at least I imagined so.



Jenn Tostlebe 36:28

All right. Well, thank you so much for sharing your paper with us. We have about five minutes left. And so we just wanted to wrap up the episode by talking about some other work that you might be involved. Now, in your introduction, we mentioned that you have several projects examining topics related to employment, race, and cognitive change. And clearly, I'm assuming, maybe not, that this paper came out of one of those projects. But can you tell us about some other things you have in the works?

S

Simon Kolbeck 36:59

Sure. Well, the main thing I'm working on is my dissertation. So what I'm trying to do is using a different sample. This data, we unfortunately can't work with any more because the Ohio Department of the ODRFS, I think, basically, they they're the ones who provided the unemployment insurance data, and there was a limited time for that grant. So my advisor and co author, Paul, had to basically close that project, unfortunately. So we're not really working with that data anymore. And for my dissertation, I'll be working with the Pathways to Desistance data. And my goal with that project is really to dig deeper into employment and to find a way to jointly measure different employment outcomes and see how they influence offending. But also, I'd like to incorporate identity theory. So some of the stuff I talked about before. And I think that's where my head's at, and what my dissertation will look at. So that's kind of what I've been wrangling with. And that's what's giving me a headache.

S

Simon Kolbeck 37:57



Simon Kolbeck 37:57

It's really, really tough. And I'll just really quickly touch on this, because I think it's something really important. It's like this whole work on employment and crime really struggles with if you think about what a measure of employment looks like, right, you have a large number of people who are unemployed, and then people who are employed. And then you have among those who are employed, you have these differences in, say, satisfaction, wages, time spent at the job, right. And you can't just throw all of those variables into a model, because they're collinear. Right? If you put in week's work, right, you have this large group of zeros. And if you do that, you don't really know necessarily whether you're actually just picking up the effect of any employment. And you can't run an interaction, because the zeros will always be perfectly correlated with one another. The model just doesn't allow that any model really. So I think that's what I'm really trying to think through how to kind of jointly come up with a measure that captures all these different employment characteristics without just masking the effect of one over the other. And that's where I'm at right now and what I'm working on.



Jenn Tostlebe 39:03

It sounds very difficult, but it also sounds really important. So I'm sure once you figure it out, it will be time well spent.



Simon Kolbeck 39:10

Yeah, I hope so. Thanks.



Jose Sanchez 39:12

Yeah. And I can say with confidence that Jenn and I can very much sympathize with the struggle.



Jenn Tostlebe 39:19

Yeah.



Simon Kolbeck 39:19

Yeah, I bet. I'm sure you know, regardless of what you study, there's always going to be measurement challenges and debates on how to do it properly. So




Jose Sanchez 39:28


I can really relate because I'm sort of grappling with some identity stuff myself for my dissertation on identity and offending. So I'm not in the happiest place with the right amount, because I still haven't figured it out. But we'll get there.

 Simon Kolbeck 39:43

Yeah, I mean, identity is also one of those things that are so difficult to measure, right, because there's so many components and not a lot of data has all of the right measures. So I sympathize with that, that struggle as well.

 Jose Sanchez 39:57

All right, well, that's all the time we have for today. Thank you so much for joining us. Is there anything you'd like to plug anything in the works that we should be on the lookout for?

 Simon Kolbeck 40:07

No, not at the moment. Thanks again so much for having me on here. I mean, I feel really honored that you guys asked me and this was a lot of fun and yeah, so thanks a bunch.

 Jose Sanchez 40:17

Absolutely.



Jenn Tostlebe 40:18

Thank you! Good luck with everything.



Jenn Tostlebe 40:20

Hey, thanks for listening.

 Jose Sanchez 40:21

Don't forget to leave us a review on Apple podcasts or iTunes. Or let us know what you think of the episode by leaving us a comment on our website, thecriminologyacademy.com.



Jenn Tostlebe 40:31

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 Jose Sanchez 40:42

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Jenn Tostlebe 40:46

See you next time!